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Housekeepers' Chat

Wednesday, July 30, 1930

Not for Publication

Subject: "Establish Good Food Habits Early." Information from Rowena Schmidt Carpenter, Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Leaflet available: "Good Food Habits for Children."

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The other day I received a letter from a worried mother. Her problem is one which a good many of us have had to solve. Let me read you her letter:

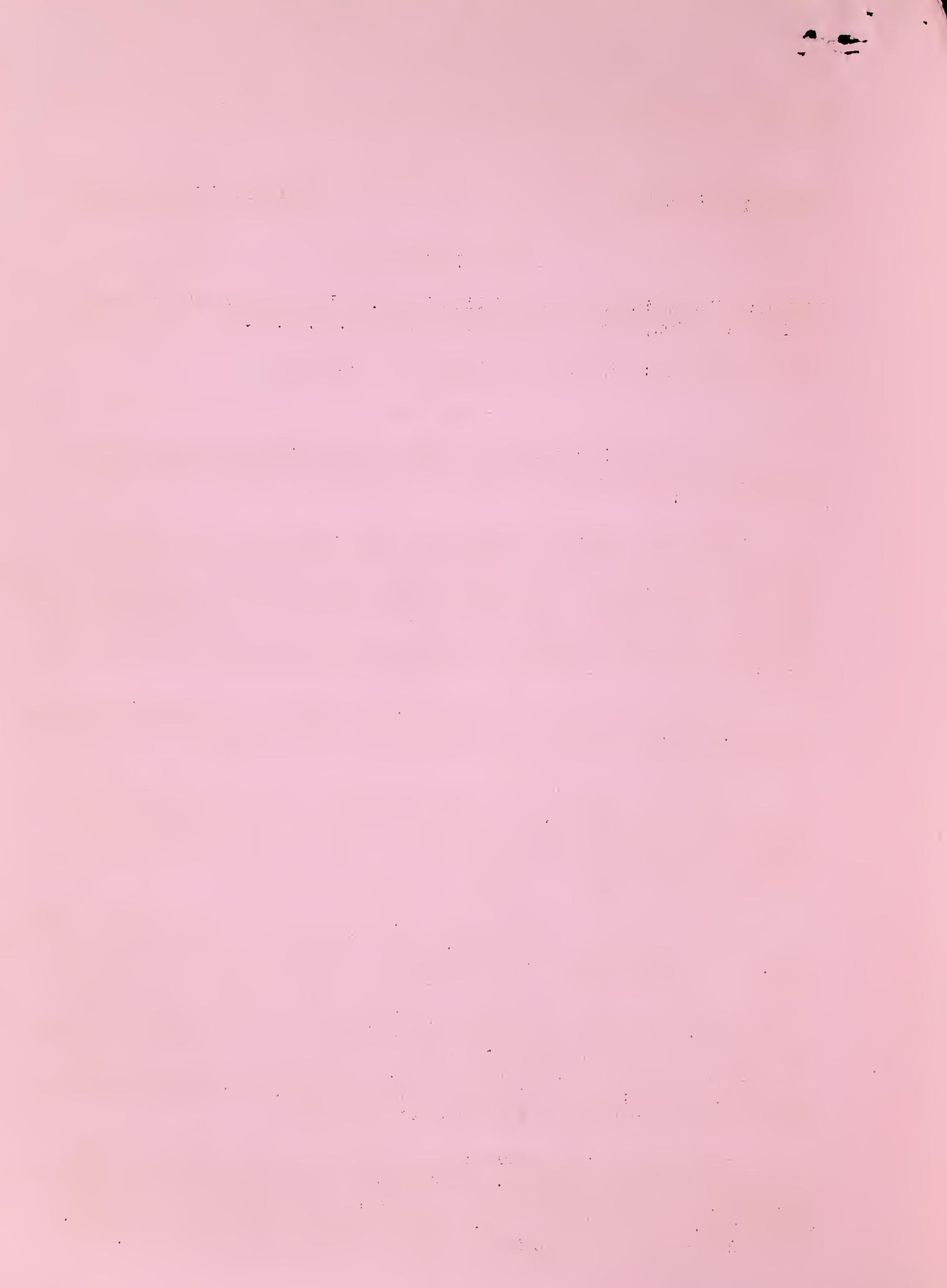
"Dear Aunt Sammy: I liked your radio program on the right kind of foods for mothers and for children. But what would you do with a youngster who seems to spend all his spare time thinking up ways to frustrate plans to make him eat? Sometimes I am at my wits' end, to know what to do with him. You told me what to feed him; now can you tell me how to make him like it? Because, after all, until a child eats his dinner it cannot begin to build strong bones and a healthy body for him."

I read this letter to Rowena Schmidt Carpenter in the Bureau of Home Economics. Mrs. Carpenter has made a study of the food habits of children, and I knew she'd be interested in this particular problem.

"Good food habits," said Mrs. Carpenter, "are largely a matter of how we start with children. It is so very easy to make the early start right, in establishing good food habits. Very young children have no decided tastes, no likes and dislikes, as we call them. Such tastes are acquired through happy or unhappy experiences in eating.

"Often-repeated tasting of a food, under happy circumstances, helps the child to get used to the flavor, and he develops a liking for it, through habit. One unfortunate experience with a new food may create a lasting dislike. So it is wise to be sure that the child is well -- not over-tired, unhappy, or ill-tempered, and then to start with a small amount of each food. Increase the size of the portion the next time, and in this way gradually let him build up a taste for each food, one by one. Before the child is weaned, he has become used to a number of fruit, vegetable and cereal flavors; by the time he is two years old, he is acquainted with almost as wide a variety of foods as his parents.

"Perhaps the greatest single good influence in building suitable food habits is a good appetite. It stands to reason that a hungry child is less likely to pick and choose at the table, less likely to be finicky, indifferent, or to refuse to eat, than is the child who has no appetite. Good health and a good appetite usually go hand in hand, and both are



stimulated by exercise, fresh air, sunshine, enough rest and sleep, regular hours of eating, and by the right food itself.

"Did you ever stop to think how eating increases the desire to eat? That is as true of little children as it is of grown-ups. On days that small Rob has his normal good appetite, he not only plunges in with zest, but his joy over eating seems to increase as the mealhour progresses. Of course good food, prepared in interesting-looking though simple ways, and served in dishes with a gay design, also creates a desire to eat. So does the fun of feeding one's self! Wielding one's own spoon or spearing little pieces of vegetable or meat with a small fork is an absorbing game, through which the child comes to feel important over his independence, while he unconsciously develops steadiness in small muscles."

Mrs. Carpenter has published a leaflet which gives in condensed form rules to try out on the toddler. Let me read them to you:

Set a definite time for meals, and allow no distractions during the meal hour.

Have the food attractive in color, odor, and flavor, so that it will tempt the appetite.

Serve small portions so that the child can clear his plate without the feeling of being stuffed.

Take it for granted that he will eat happily everything served to him, and be sure that he becomes acquainted with a variety of foods.

Let him feed himself, and experience the joy of self-help.

Be consistent in responding to a child's pranks and ruses. Laughing at one time and punishing the next is never effective.

Remember that the table is a place for good comradeship and not for discipline or nagging.

Have no differences of authority between the parents and other adults in deciding questions about the child's eating.

Refrain absolutely from discussing the child's eating habits with others in his presence.

Begin today. The training or the re-training in food habits is too important to wait until tomorrow.

And, now, let me suggest that if you are especially interested in this subject, I should like to send you free of charge the leaflet that contains a fuller discussion of food habits. Every idea in it has been used successfully on some child, and the pictures are of real children. Mrs. Carpenter has known at the Child Research Center in Washington. If you want a copy write to me and ask for Leaflet No. 42, "Good Food Habits for Children."

Our menu today is an unusually easy one to prepare: Scrambled Eggs; Baked Tomatoes; Summer Squash; and Apple Sauce and Cinnamon Toast. Here's a good easy way to fix the Baked Tomatoes:

Wash tomatoes, remove the stem ends, cut in half, place in a shallow greased baking dish, cover with buttered bread crumbs seasoned with salt and pepper. Add a little water to keep the tomatoes from sticking to the dish. Bake in a moderate oven for 30 minutes, or until the tomatoes are tender and the crumbs brown.

Thursday: "The Fall Flower Garden."

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